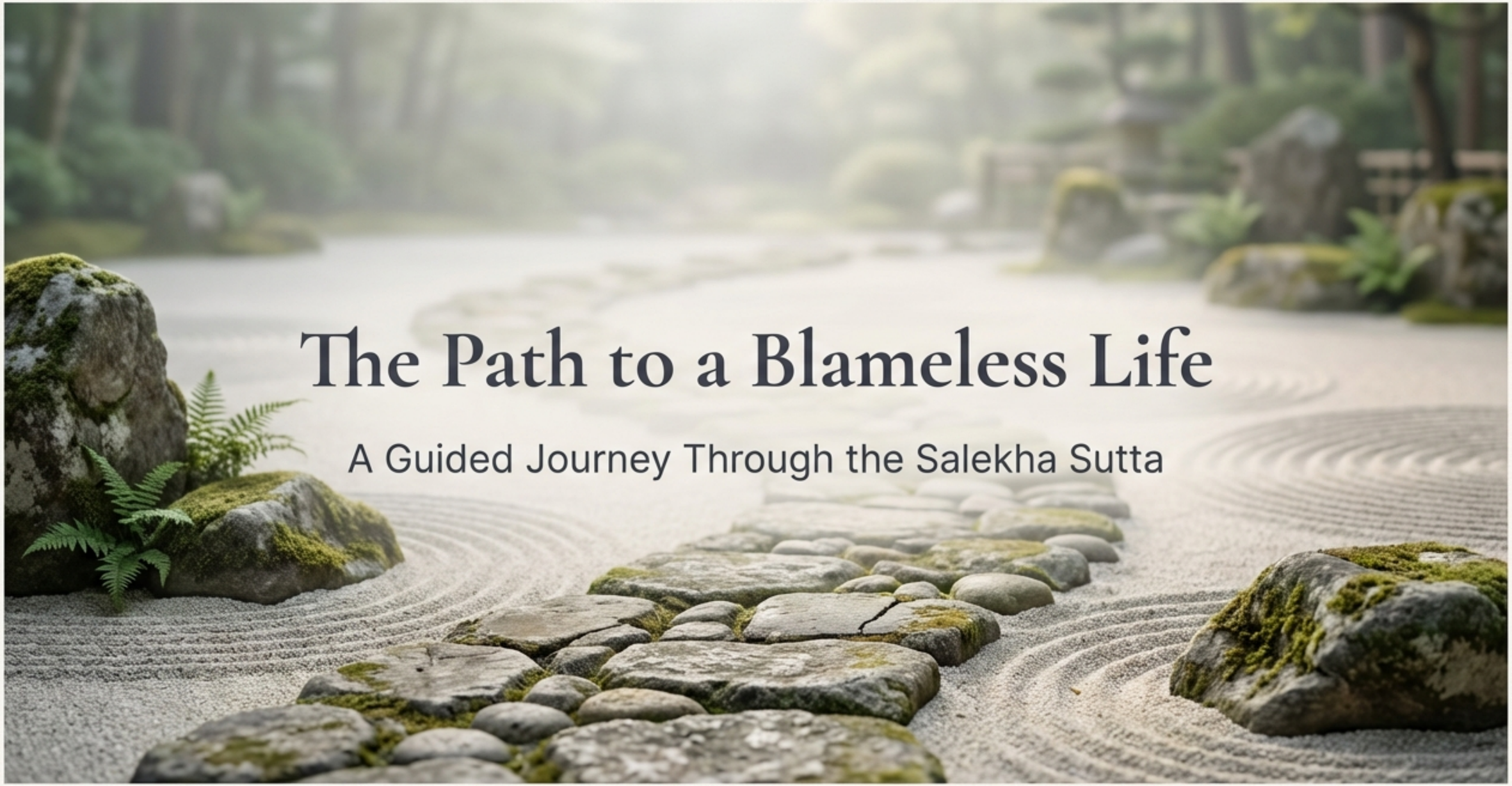
The Path to a Blameless Life
A Guided Journey Through the Salekha Sutta

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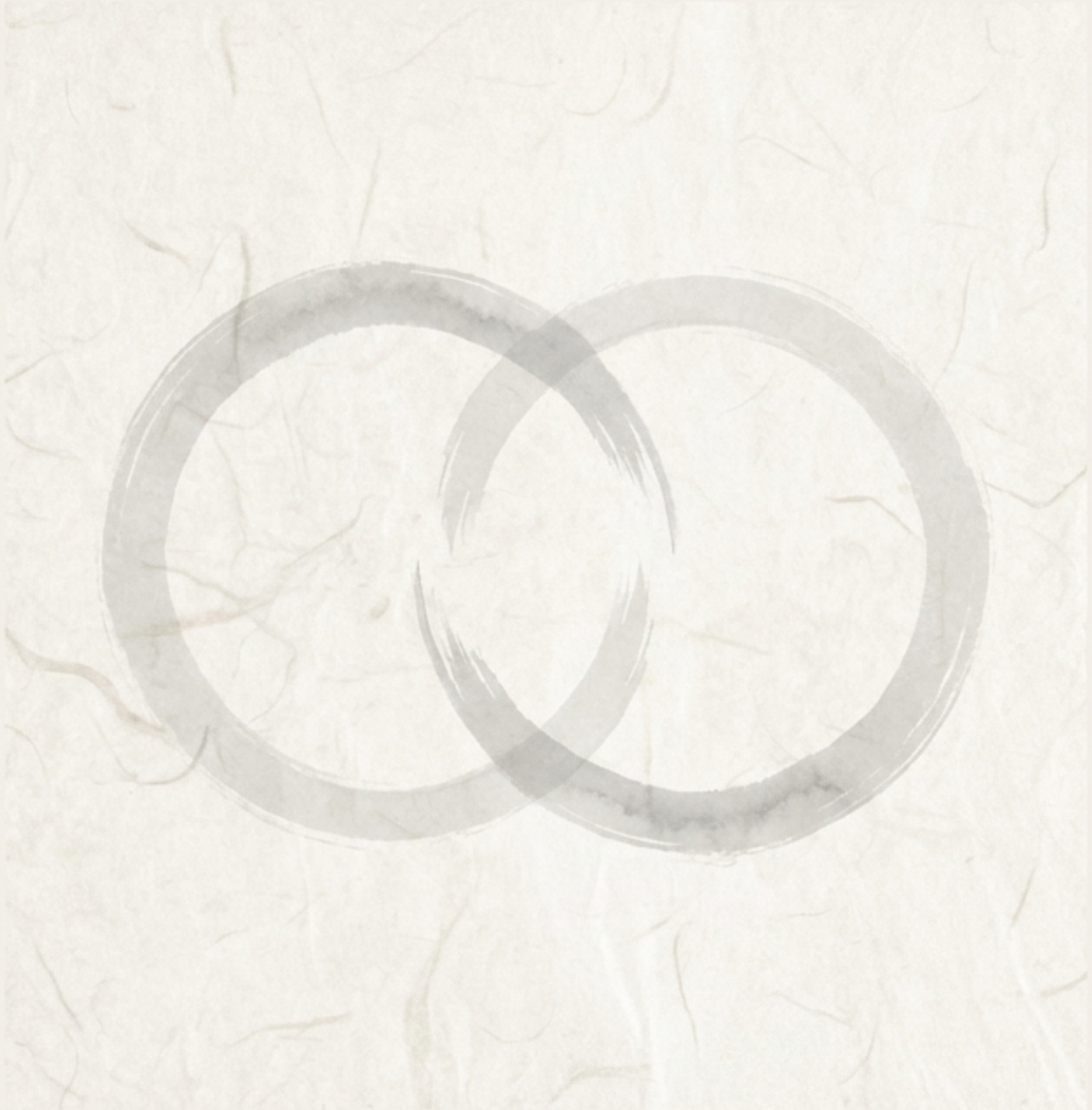

A Question Arises in Jeta’s Grove

The scene is set at the monastery of Jeta's Grove. The Venerable Maha Cunda approaches the Buddha in the evening with a question:

> “Venerable Sir, various wrong views arise in the world concerning the self and the cosmos. For a monk who is just beginning to attend to the matter, what is the key to abandoning and dispelling these views?”

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A Common Misconception on the Path

The Buddha points to a practitioner who achieves a state of deep meditative absorption (the first jhāna) and mistakenly thinks:

“I am leading a blameless life (a life of effacement).”

Cunda, in the discipline of the noble ones, this is not called “effacement.”
It is called a **“pleasant abiding in the here and now.”**

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Pleasant & Peaceful Abidings Are Not The Goal

The Buddha clarifies that this misconception applies to a range of profound states:

The Four Form Jhānas

- States of deep bliss and equanimity.

For each, the practitioner might think it it is effacement, but the Buddha calls them **“pleasant abidings.”**

The Four Formless Jhānas

- Even more subtle states beyond ordinary perception, like the dimensions of infinite space or infinite consciousness.

For each, the Buddha calls them **“peaceful abidings.”**

These are highly refined states of mind, but they are not, in themselves, the practice of effacement that leads to liberation.

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This is How You Should Practice Effacement

The path is defined by a conscious, determined choice to cultivate the opposite of unskillful behavior.

The Way of the World

The Path of Effacement

Others will be harmful; we shall not be harmful here.

Others will kill living beings; we shall not kill living beings here.

Effacement is not a state you fall into; it is a resolution you uphold.

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The 44 Practices, Part I: The Foundation of Conduct

Purity of Action and Speech

We will be **non-harming** & refrain from **killing**.

We will refrain from **stealing**.

We will be **celibate**.

We will refrain from **lying**.

We will refrain from **slanderous speech**.

We will refrain from **harsh speech**.

We will refrain from **idle chatter**.

We will be **un-covetous**.

We will be without **ill-will**.

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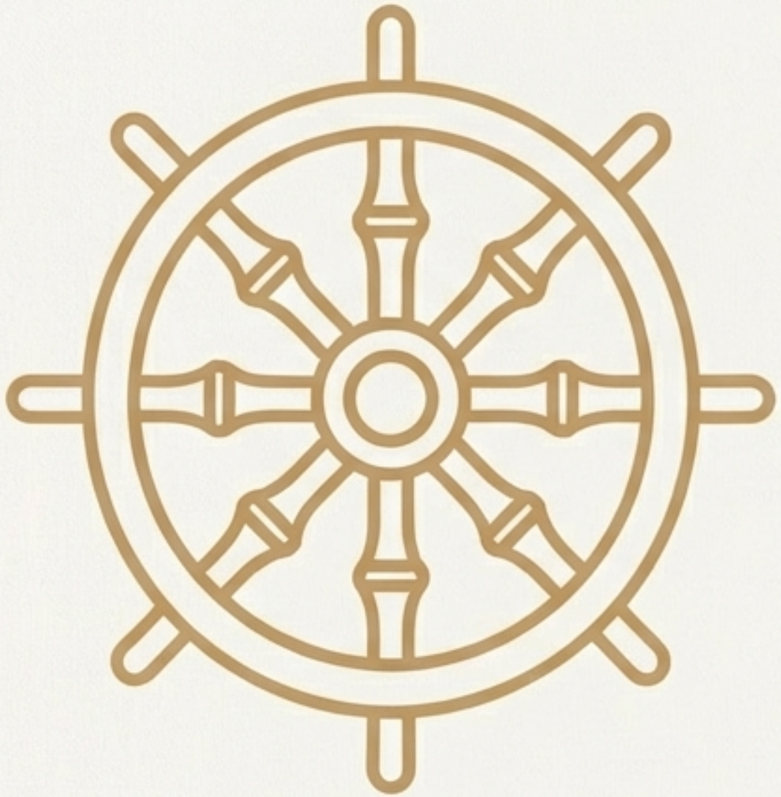

The 44 Practices, Part II: The Framework for Liberation

Aligning with the Right Path

While others have Wrong View, we will have **Right View**.

While others have Wrong Resolve, we will have **Right Resolve.**

While others have Wrong Speech, we will have **Right Speech**.

While others have Wrong Action, we will have **Right Action**.

While others have Wrong Livelihood, we will have **Right Livelihood**.

While others have Wrong Effort, we will have **Right Effort**.

While others have Wrong Mindfulness, we will have **Right Mindfulness**.

While others have Wrong Concentration, we will have **Right Concentration**.

(And beyond the eightfold path): We will have **Right Knowledge** and **Right Liberation**.

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The 44 Practices, Part III: The Inner Work of the Mind

Uprooting Mental Defilements

We will be free from **sloth and torpor**.

We will be **un-agitated**.

We will be free from **doubt**.

We will be free from **anger** and **malice**.

We will be free from **contempt** and **domineering**.

We will be free from **envy** and **avarice**.

We will be free from **deceit** and **fraud**.

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The 44 Practices, Part IV: The Cultivation of Virtue

Developing a Wholesome Character

We will be **pliant**, not stubborn.

We will be **humble**, not arrogant.

We will be **easy to admonish**, not difficult.

We will have **good friends**.

We will be **heedful**, not heedless.

We will be **endowed with faith**.

We will have **shame** and **fear of wrongdoing**.

We will be **learned**, **energetic**, **mindful**, and **wise**.

We will **not misapprehend our views** or be attached to them, but will let them go easily.

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The Power of a Single Thought

"Cunda, I say that even the arising of a thought directed toward skillful qualities is of great benefit, let alone the bodily and verbal actions that follow it."

Implic: The journey of effacement begins in the mind. The resolution to walk the path is, in itself, a powerful and meritorious act.

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The Metaphor of the Safe Road

Just as there might be a dangerous, uneven road, and another safe, even road to evade it... So too is the path of effacement.

- For the person engaged in harming, non-harming is the safe road to evade it.
- For the person engaged in lying, truthfulness is the safe road to evade it.
- For the person engaged in ill-will, goodwilll is the safe road to evade it.

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The Threefold Purpose of the Path

The Buddha explains that these 44 practices accomplish three essential goals simultaneously.

3. For **Final Quenching (Parinibbāna)**
They are the direct cause for attaining ultimate liberation.

2. For **Upliftment**
They are the way to develop all skillful qualities that lead upward.

1. For **Evasion**
They are the way to evade all that is unskillful and dangerous.

All unskillful states lead downward; all skillful states lead upward. The choice is clear.

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Stuck in the Mud

The Analogy

Cunda, it is **impossible** that one who is himself **stuck in the mud** could pull out another who is stuck in the mud... But it is **possible** that one who is **not stuck** in the mud himself could pull out another.

The Meaning

One who is not yet tamed, disciplined, and quenched cannot hope to tame, discipline, and quench others. **Self-purification** is the **prerequisite** for helping the world.

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Every Step is a Step Toward Liberation

The Ultimate Purpose

The Buddha repeats the entire list of 44 practices, stating for each one that its purpose is the attainment of Parinibbāna.

‘**Non-harming** is for the purpose of **final quenching**.’
‘**Right** View is for the purpose of **final quenching**.’
‘**Humility** is for the purpose of **final quenching**.’
‘Non-attachment to views is for the purpose of **final quenching**.’

The means and the end are inseparable.
The path itself leads directly to the goal.

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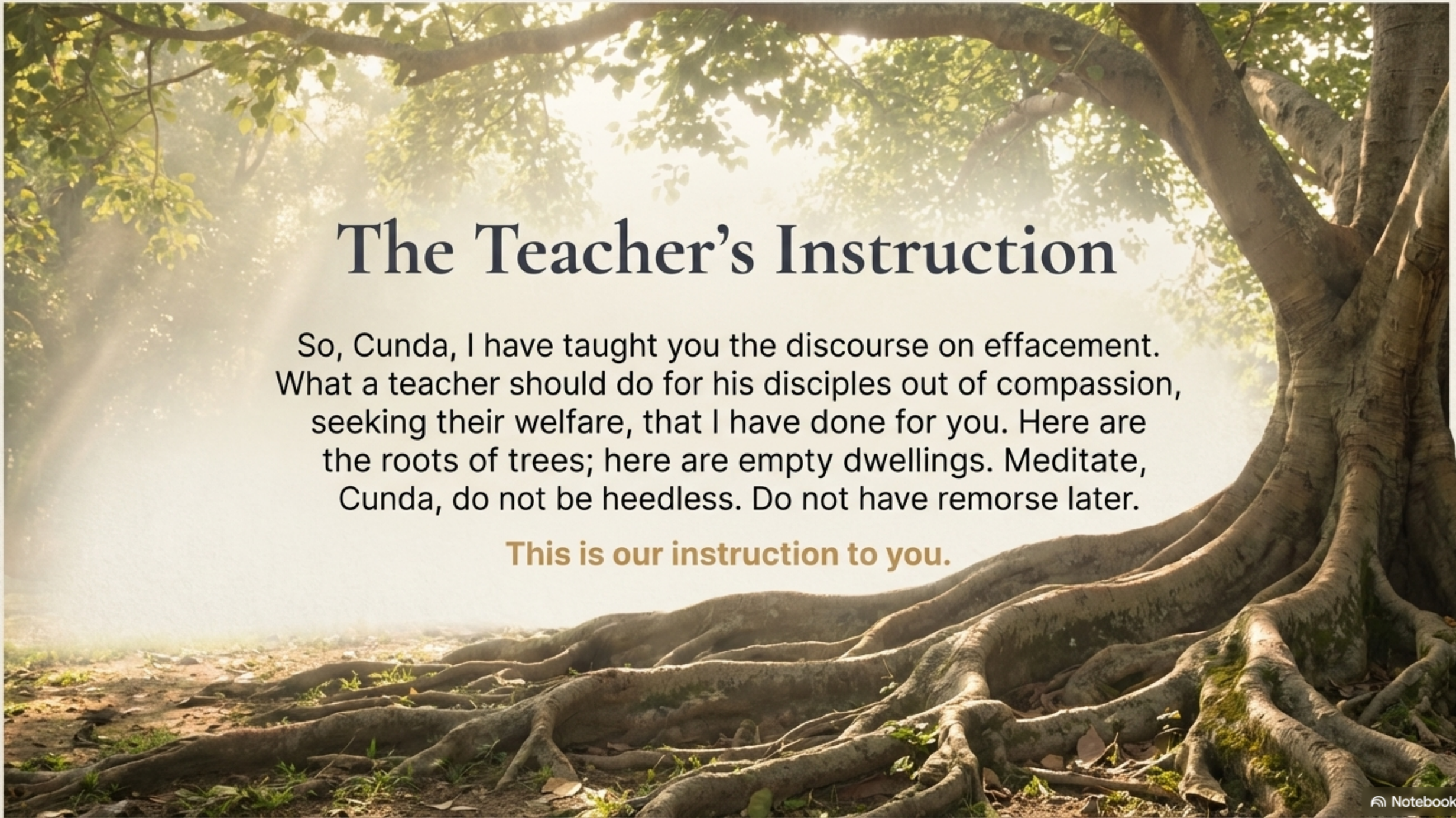
The Teacher's Instruction
So, Cunda, I have taught you the discourse on effacement. What a teacher should do for his disciples out of compassion, seeking their welfare, that I have done for you. Here are the roots of trees; here are empty dwellings. Meditate, Cunda, do not be heedless. Do not have remorse later.
This is our instruction to you.
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